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Wednesday, October 6, 2004

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Edward Jones
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City growth plan calls for 24 urban centers

Aubrey Cohen, The Bellingham Herald

The Bellingham growth forum wrapped up Tuesday with some very specific ideas about where and how to accommodate the 31,600 people projected to move to the city and its growth area between 2002 and 2022.

The plan calls for a series of denser urban centers, some infilling of established neighborhoods and the city growth area and expansion of the growth area to Smith Road.

"Bellingham is an incredible place to live," Bellingham Planning and Community Development Director Jorge Vega told the more than 100 people who came to Tuesday's workshop. "We know it. The world is finding out."

The projected growth would require about 14,100 new homes - 3,615 more than the city and growth area can fit as they are now, Vega said.

Bill Grimes of Studio Cascade, a Spokane consulting firm, presented two alternatives that put most of the additional homes in new or existing urban centers that could accommodate denser development with less disruption.

The 24 centers include large areas such as downtown, Fair-haven and Barkley Village; neighborhood villages like the Fountain District, Old Town and the Ohio Street area; and pocket centers like the Silver Beach shopping center on North Shore Road, the intersection of Elm Street and Northwest Avenue, and Samish Way, by the Lake Padden Golf Course.

The plans put 7,300 to 9,525 new homes in these centers, leaving 5,200 to 7,174 homes to be fit into more established residential areas.

The plans call for significant development in the Guide Meridian,

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Mount Baker and Samish neighborhoods, all of which would expand into the city's growth area, and many new homes in the Birchwood, Cornwall Park, Happy Valley and South neighborhoods. York, the city's densest neighborhood, is the only one slated for no additional homes.

The plan would fit new homes into existing residential areas mostly as accessory units on existing lots, with cluster homes, cottages, town homes, smaller lot developments and small apartment buildings in some neighborhoods. Conditions, such as design review and requirements that homes have access to an alley and be near or adjacent to neighborhood centers, would help protect neighborhood character.

The plan calls for 1,800 homes in Larrabee Springs, a new district proposed for the area southwest of Smith Road and Guide Meridian, outside the current city and growth area.

The plan also suggests other measures to, among other things, increase citizen input, ensure infilling happens and works as intended, provide proper infrastructure and amenities, and increase communication among city officials and between different governments.

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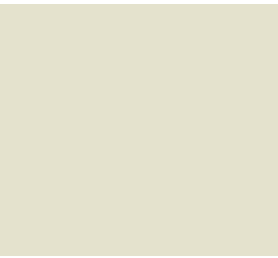


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